

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: *Joshua Starr*

Date: *2/29/08* Bill Number: *5593*

***Testimony of Dr. Joshua Starr, Superintendent of the Stamford Public Schools,
represented by Mary Jennings, Director of Literacy and Social Studies and
Mara Siladi, Director of Grants and Funded Programs Before the Select Committee on
Education addressing the Raised Bill No. 5593 "AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY
READING SUCCESS GRANTS"***

February 29, 2008

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee: On behalf of Dr. Starr and Stamford Public Schools we would like to thank the committee for allowing a public hearing on Raised Bill No. 5593 ***"AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY READING SUCCESS GRANTS."***

This bill proposes stronger accountability measures for intensive early intervention reading programs that are aimed at reducing the achievement gap in reading, by utilizing student performance data to guide professional development for teachers and the coaching process for reading specialists. The new accountability measures—including the establishment of performance indicators, program efficacy standards and documentation of continuous classroom observation of students' reading behaviors—will hold districts responsible for increasing student performance by reporting percentage of students in grades one to three who are at or above proficiency on the Connecticut Mastery Test, and addressing the needs of students who do not meet or exceed this benchmark.

Given my background in educational accountability, I welcome the opportunity to support the State Department of Education in actualizing the literacy goals as set forth in Bill No. 5593. Our district goals reflect our deep commitment to closing the achievement gap in reading among all our students. For Stamford's 2008-09 proposed budget, I have developed an aggressive plan to address the achievement gap in our lower performing schools, identified as 'in need of improvement' year 4, despite extremely tight budgetary conditions. We are faced with difficult decisions to serve all of our students while complying with state and federal mandates, some of which are unfunded. Moreover, the loss of the Early Reading Success Grant for 2008-09 in the amount of \$1.5 million will create an even greater fiscal burden on the Stamford taxpayers. I ask that you consider maintaining the funding for key components of the Early Reading Success Grant, including the after-school reading intervention programs, professional development for teachers in grades K-3, parent facilitators to promote parental involvement, and the Early Literacy Coaches.

The intensive after-school reading intervention programs, serving identified students in grades K-3, provide a continuum of support for students who have not yet met proficiency. We also must increase opportunities for high quality professional development for our teachers. Engaging families as our partners in preparing students for academic success has never been more important than now. And the Early Literacy

Coach position is crucial to the effective implementation of the reading goals set forth in Bill No 5593, including the following responsibilities:

- Implementation of Scientifically Based Reading Research Initiative;
- Facilitation of and provision of direct services to individual or small groups of students;
- Communication with parents regarding reading strategies that may enhance reading skills at home;
- Mentoring and coaching of teachers in the classrooms as well as through workshops and seminars;
- Mentoring teachers in the collection and utilization of data to drive instruction;
- Coaching and assisting teachers in disaggregation of student performance data for application to daily instruction;
- Building capacity among teachers;
- Acting as the point professional staff member to disseminate State Department of Education reading modules to teachers and ensuring that instruction is aligned with reading competencies; and
- Serving as a liaison between teachers, school administrators, central office administrators, and the State Department of Education.

I commend the Committee for recognizing the need for stronger accountability measures to address the achievement gap in reading among our students. Raised Bill No. 5593, if enacted, would be a great advance in providing measures that guide us in setting higher expectations for student performance, and the professional development opportunities for our teachers that actualize improved reading instruction for our students. I urge you to maintain the \$1.5 million Early Reading Success funding because these funds are essential for Priority School Districts to comply with the requirements of the ***ACT CONCERNING EARLY READING SUCCESS GRANT PROGRAM*** and to ensure that all of our students achieve at high levels.